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WAUKEGAN - With nearly 25 streets gangs, and more than 1,500 active gang members, the city is a great candidate for increased anti-gang funding, U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin said Tuesday.

In a visit where the senior Democrat met with local government and law enforcement leaders promoting new legislation, Durbin said he was surprised to hear Waukegan had so many gang members.

"This is certainly a high gang-intensity area," Durbin said. "There's a lot of work to be done here. We need the resources."

Durbin was in Waukegan to host a gang roundtable, which included former gang members, and local and regional politicians and law enforcement leaders. The roundtable was scheduled to discuss support of the Gang Abatement and Prevention Act, a September 2007 bill passed by the Senate, which is currently awaiting attention by the U.S. House.

The bill includes more than \$175 million in gang funding and would also support harsher penalties for gang-related crimes.

With \$175 million to go around, Durbin said he thinks the Waukegan area would qualify for some funds, considering the high number of gang members.

Gang Abatement and Prevention Act funds would join a \$846,000 anti-gang grant secured by U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R- Highland Park, for Waukegan last month.

One of the most important steps in squashing gang activity is stopping the recruitment when kids are at impressionable ages, said Waukegan Police Chief Bill Biang.

Having something for kids to do between the time they get out of school and the time their parents return from work is a major step in that, Biang said.

"We need to keep them busy," Biang said.

The roundtable included former gang members Quentin Colier of Waukegan and Ah-Roniss Williams of North Chicago.

The roundtable kicked around ideas of putting any acquired funds toward after-school programs, or even toward classes, which would help educate parents on gangs.

"We can't save every soul, but if we don't try it means more and more violence," Durbin said.